

Message Text

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5907

INFO AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

AMCONSUL MELBOURNE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SYDNEY 2442

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PGOV, PINT, AS

SUBJ: ELECTION OF NEW PREMIER IN NEW SOUTH WALES

REF : SYDNEY 2434

1. LIBERAL PARTY CAUCUS TODAY MET AND ELECTED TOM LEWIS ITS NEW LEADER WHO WILL BECOME PREMIER ABOUT THE END OF THE YEAR. WHILE THE MATHEMATICS OF THE VOTE ARE SECRET, THE OUTCOME MAY HAVE BEEN INFLUENCED BY A SIGNIFICANT DEPARTURE FROM PAST PRACTICE IN THAT PREMIER ASKIN ANNOUNCED THAT THE BALLOTING WOULD BE CONDUCTED ON "FIRST PAST THE POST SYSTEM" RATHER THAN THE CUSTOMARY AUSTRALIAN PREFERENTIAL SYSTEM. WITH 33 MEMBERS VOTING, 17 VOTES WERE REQUIRED FOR VICTORY. IN THE FIRST BALLOT, NO ONE ACHIEVED 17 VOTES BUT THE SCRUTINEERS ANNOUNCED THAT MADDISON HAD BEEN ELIMINATED THEREBY BRINGING ABOUT A SECOND VOTE, IN WHICH LEWIS WAS ELECTED. THE OBVIOUS CONCLUSION MUST BE THAT AFTER THE ELIMINATION OF MADDISON, MOST OF HIS THREE TO FIVE VOTES WERE TRANSFERRED TO LEWIS.

2. PRIOR TO THE VOTING FOR DEPUTY LEADER, A LEADING CONTENDER, MINISTER FOR MINES AND POWER WAL FIFE, WITHDREW IN ORDER TO LEAVE THE FIELD CLEAR FOR MADDISON WHO REPRESENTING

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A CITY ELECTORATE (HORNSBY), COULD BALANCE OFF THE

ELECTION OF LEWIS WHO IS FROM A COUNTRY ELECTORATE (WOLLONDILLY). THE RESULT WAS MADDISON'S ELECTION, PROBABLY BY A HEAVY MAJORITY OVER RICHARD HEALEY.

3. LIBERAL MEMBER BARRALOUGH, WHO SUPPORTED LEWIS, REPORTS THAT WHILE THERE IS ELATION AMONG LEWIS' SUPPORTERS, THERE IS ALSO A DEEP SADNESS FOR WILLIS WHO IS WELL LIKED AND ADMIRER AND HAS SERVED AS DEPUTY LEADER FOR 15 YEARS. FIRST TASK IS TO SMOOTH OVER ANY CLEAVAGES WHICH MAY HAVE DEVELOPED DURING THE INTENSIVE BACKROOM POLITICING OF THE PAST FEW WEEKS.

4. CONFIRMING JUDGMENT OF PARA 4 REFTTEL, BARRY UNSWORTH, A LEADING MEMBER OF THE NSW LABOR PARTY AND LABOR COUNCIL, TOLD ME IMMEDIATELY AFTER THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF LEWIS' ELECTION, THAT THIS WOULD SUIT THE LABOR PARTY'S INTERESTS. MADDISON, HAD HE BEEN ELECTED, WOULD HAVE BEEN ABLE TO UNDERCUT THE LEADERSHIP OF THE LABOR PARTY IN NSW WHICH IS RELATIVELY CONSERVATIVE, WHEREAS LEWIS IS FAR LESS WELL KNOWN HAVING BEEN IN THE BACKGROUND AS FAR AS THE PUBLIC IS CONCERNED BECAUSE OF HIS INVOLVEMENT IN MANAGERIAL MINISTRIES RATHER THAN IN MINISTRIES REQUIRING EXTENSIVE PUBLIC EXPOSURE. COMMENT: IF LEWIS IS AS GOOD A PUBLIC POLITICIAN AS HE OBVIOUSLY IS A BACKROOM POLITICIAN, THEN THIS WILL BE A WASTING ASSET FOR LABOR SINCE LEWIS IN HIS NEW FRONT RANK ROLE AS PREMIER SHOULD SOON BE ABLE TO ACQUIRE THE PUBLIC IMAGE HE LACKS.

HANNAH

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